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The Spectacle of Violence in Duterte's "War on Drugs"

Danilo Andres Reyes

Abstract: This article argues that, in Duterte's "war on drugs", state power is exercised through the body in a spectacle of humiliation and violence. The analysis draws from the work of Foucault (1979) on the political value of a spectacle of the body to explain the distinctive character of Duterte's violent war on drugs; of Feldman (1991) on the use of the body as an object in which violence is embodied to send political messages; of Agamben (1995) on eliminating life supposedly devoid of value; and on Mumford et al. (2007), who pointed to the popularity of "violent ideological leaders." I argue that, under the Duterte administration, criminals are humiliated and killed in a spectacle of violence that politicises their lives, sending a message that intimidates others. In the process, law-abiding citizens are meant to feel safe, which is seen as likely to increase the newly elected president's popularity and his power as chief executive. Duterte has thereby politicised life, not only putting criminals outside the benefit of state protection but actively targeting them. Duterte is the first mayor and president to have actively targeted criminals and, in doing so has encouraged other politicians to follow his example. The politicisation of the bodies of criminals is distinctive in Duterte's form of violence. This article is drawn from data sets of individual killings when Duterte was either serving as or acting behind the mayor of Davao, and compared with cases of drug-related killings since he became president on 30 June 2016.

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Keywords: Philippines, Philippine politics, political killing, political violence, mass killing, impunity, human rights

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Introduction

In this article,[1] I argue that Philippine President Rodrigo R. Duterte's "war on drugs" uses the body in a spectacle of humiliation and violence designed to cow criminals and to convince the ordinary citizen that they can feel protected. By doing so he believes he will increase his popularity and enhance the power of the presidency. Duterte's message in his war on drugs is clear: criminals can be humiliated and killed in order to protect law abiding and god-fearing Filipinos. Duterte has been very explicit in saying that the lives of drug dealers, users and criminals have no value because there is no "redeeming factor in being a criminal" (*Al Jazeera* 2016a: 7:44–9:12). On killings outside of police operations, he stated categorically that if criminals are killed by the thousands because he encourages it then this "is fine" and their deaths are "not my problem" (*Al Jazeera* 2016a: 7:44–9:12).

Duterte's promise to kill drug dealers, users and criminals attracted popular support in his presidential election campaign from January to May 2016. The huge crowds at his rallies laughed, clapped, cheered and chanted "Duterte! Duterte!" every time he reassured them that he would kill all the criminals he could once he became president. When Duterte won this election, he appointed Ronald dela Rosa, Duterte's former police chief in Davao, as chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP). This appointment confirmed that he had meant exactly what he had said during the campaign: "I will just do what I did in Davao" (*YouTube* 2016c: 20:13–22:01). Dela Rosa signalled to ordinary citizens that drug dealers are legitimate targets, and they could kill any drug lord they knew of (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2016e). He thereby legitimised violence against those singled out as being part of the drug trade by ordinary citizens and vigilante groups.

Using official statistics gathered by the PNP, in the period from Duterte's ascension to the presidency in July 2016 to the end of December 2016 (when this article was completed), there were over 6,100 deaths linked to the "war on drugs" – both from police operations and vigilante-style killings (*Rappler* 2016d). Besides this astonishing number of deaths in such a short period of time, supposed criminals were humiliated and killed in a manner that turned these murders into spectacles.

1 Acknowledgement: The author would like to thank his thesis supervisor, Prof. Mark R. Thompson, for his guidance and insightful comments that helped improve the content of this article; Dr. Nicole Curato, a fellow contributor to this special series; and the anonymous reviewers, for their useful comments and suggestions.

Shaming has been carried out through the state-sanctioned listing of names of suspected drug dealers, users and criminals. It commenced with the Philippine National Police (PNP) issuance of the Anti-Illegal Drugs Campaign Plan Project: "Double Barrel" on 1 July, the day Duterte assumed the presidency. The lists of drug dealers and users, public officials and private individuals, based on information obtained from investigations and intelligence reports, have been used in legitimate police operations. The names of high-profile personalities – the elected officials, court judges and police generals – allegedly involved in trade of illegal drugs have been made public (*Rappler* 2016c; *CNN Philippines* 2016).

This is the same method Duterte used in Davao City when he revealed the names of suspected drug dealers and users in radio and television shows, telling them to stop their illegal activities. The police would then visit the houses of persons on the list, known in Cebuano as "*Tokhang*" (*tok-tok* [knock], *hangyo* [request]). The police and the military would then speak to the person and his family members and warn them to stop selling and using drugs. This was, and is, often a prelude to killings. In Davao, many of those killed in police operations and vigilante killings were persons on the list. Why should they be killed? Duterte implies drug addicts are not human and criminals have no place in society (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2016f; *Rappler* 2016f; *Al Jazeera* 2016a: 11:24–12:48). The police, using entrapment operations, search the houses of suspects and question them for ignoring their warnings. If the suspected individuals fight with the policemen or "*nanlaban*", they can be killed in the process.

This article suggests that in Duterte's "war on drugs" state power is exercised through the human body in a spectacle of humiliation and violence. This analysis draws from the work of Foucault (1979) on the political value of a spectacle of the body to explain the distinctive character of Duterte's violence; of Feldman (1991) on the use of the body as an object in which violence is embodied to send political messages; of Agamben (1995) on eliminating life supposedly devoid of value; and on Mumford et al. (2007), who pointed to the popularity of "violent ideological leaders." I will argue that, under the Duterte administration, criminals are humiliated and killed in a spectacle of violence that politicises their lives, sending a message that intimidates others. In the process, law-abiding citizens are meant to feel safe, which is seen as likely to increase the newly elected president's popularity and his power as chief executive. Duterte has thereby politicised life, not only putting criminals outside of state protection but actively targeting them.

There are three parts to this paper. Part I begins by theorising the political value of the "spectacle of violence" on the body to impose discipline, the use of the body as material to carry political messages, the politicisation of the body in which political decisions are made regarding who can be killed, and the popularity of such violent leaders. Part II discusses the distinctive feature of Duterte's violence in Davao compared to Joseph Estrada and Alfredo Lim – the former president and the former mayor of Manila, respectively – who also took a tough stand on criminals. Part III discusses how Duterte's practices in Davao have influenced those in other cities in Mindanao and the Visayas. One city had institutionalised death squads and another rewards policemen who kill criminals. Part III also discusses how this violence has become a form of political capital used by local politicians to acquire votes to win elections, get re-elected, and launch a successful political comeback after being defeated in past elections.

The observations made in this article are drawn from the author's analysis of 1,220 cases of killings[2] since Duterte assumed the presidency and compared with the 1,424 cases of killings[3] in Davao from 1998 to 2015, where Duterte was either the mayor or behind the mayor.[4] This data was built by drawing from the template of the Coalition against Summary Execution (CASE) as a guide.[5] I have modified the CASE

2 This data set covers individual cases of persons killed from 1 July to 10 November 2016. Sources are from established news organisations, notably the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*'s "The Kill List" and *Rappler*'s "In Numbers" (*GMA News* 2016c; *Rappler* 2016d; *Inquirer* 2016b).

3 I have obtained permission from the CASE, a Davao-based coalition against Davao Death Squad (DDS) killings, to use their data set for this article. On November 3 to 4, I presented key findings of this article at the CSO National Consultation on Summary Executions in La Salle Green Hills, Mandaluyong City. The research was funded by Supplementary Fund for Research Degree Studies at the Department of Asian and International Studies (AIS), City University of Hong Kong.

4 From 1992 to 1998, Duterte was mayor of Davao. From 1998 to 2001, Duterte's vice mayor and former political ally, Benjamin de Guzman, took over. Duterte ran for Congress after completing his three terms as mayor. In the 2001 election, De Guzman broke away from Duterte's party to challenge his election for mayor. Duterte defeated De Guzman to complete another three terms as mayor from 2001 to 2010. In 2010, Duterte was elected vice mayor and endorsed his daughter, Sara, who took over as mayor. Duterte was barred from running as mayor after he had completed his three terms. In 2013, Duterte was again elected mayor.

5 The limitation of the CASE format is that it relies heavily on news clippings. Nevertheless, the former UN Special Rapporteur Prof. Philip Alston accepted

template by adding sections on "case details", "suspects" and "justifications". This template allows comparisons about how violence was "performed" on the body, the identities of the perpetrators of this violence and the explanation on the use of violence. To verify and supplement this information, I conducted some preliminary fieldwork[6] involving face-to-face interviews with members of the families of the victims, journalists and the staff of human rights NGOs. As Pachirat (2009: 160) pointed out, the politics of embodiment, in which the political – the researcher – becomes the instrument of research, is "capable of generating insights about politics and power that might otherwise be missed."

My social location – as a former resident of Davao and as a former journalist covering stories in Mindanao and a native speaker of Cebuano – gave me an advantage in terms of understanding the local nuances. The fieldwork for this article was mainly conducted to verify, update and consult the accuracy of information collected from primary and secondary sources. Duterte's speeches were transcribed and then interpreted using discourse analysis as a method. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow and Parker have explained that spoken language, acts, physical artefacts and text (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012: 42; Parker 1992: 22) form the starting point in this type of analysis. Local knowledge is also crucial as it gives an insider's perspectives that place the local meaning and context of the field research being analysed into perspective (Bevir and Rhodes 2015: 23). My familiarity with Duterte's spoken language helps counter the claim that non-Cebuano speakers fail to understand and grasp the meaning and intention of his speeches, such as cognitive dissonance between Cebuano and Tagalog speakers or that his speech was hyperbole and should not be taken literally, etc.

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the reliability of this format when he included the information these news reports provided on the Davao Death Squad (DDS) during his field investigation in 2007.

6 A fieldwork was conducted in General Santos City on 13 to 27 August 2016. The length of stay for my fieldwork (two weeks) may not be satisfactory for an ideal ethnographic research. However, longer periods of stay may not be necessary because I lived, studied and worked in Davao and Cotabato provinces in Mindanao.

Theorising the "Spectacle of Violence" under Duterte

Does a spectacle of the body have a political meaning? Michel Foucault's (1979: 58) concept of "spectacle of the scaffold," in which criminals are publicly tortured to extract a confession and then are publicly executed, suggests that a "spectacle" has political meaning. In early modern Europe, punishing criminals with all possible humiliation, pain and suffering was meant to activate the power of the sovereign (Foucault 1979: 34, 49, 56). In Foucault's concept, state-sanctioned violence – judicial torture and public executions – was meant to show the exercise of sovereign's power through the bodies of its subjects. It was used to arouse feelings of terror and make people aware that offenders would be punished. The spectacle seen by people of criminals of the scaffold or in torture chambers and public execution platforms was a political ritual in which the excessive violence employed on the bodies of those deemed criminals activated the power of the sovereign. This type of punishment sent a message to the subjects that they would be punished in the same manner if they violated the laws of the sovereign. The sovereigns described in Foucault's concept were absolute rulers.

The individuals who were humiliated and killed in Duterte's war on drugs were alleged criminals who were neither investigated nor convicted for the crimes they were supposed to have committed. The "spectacle" in the war on drugs is distinct because the violence inflicted on the body of criminals is perpetrated by both state and non-state actors. The supposed criminals were punished by the state's coercive apparatus (the police and the military) and non-state actors (the vigilante and hired killers) before their guilt was established. The sovereign in the Philippine political system is the people, who are personified by Duterte as the chief executive. Therefore, there is political value in this "spectacle" in punishing criminals, by humiliating and killing them, and this punishment outside the ordinary legal process has political meaning to it. A common feature in the practice of punishing criminals is the use of the body as material to impose discipline as well as a vehicle to carry political messages.

In Allen Feldman's (1991: 5–9) study on formations of violence in urban Northern Ireland (1969 to 1986), he concluded that government could make use of the body as an object to carry political messages. These messages are inscribed by embodying the very act of violence on the body. Feldman found that the body is a central object in the political struggle by making it a "political artifact." In Northern Ireland, in the

struggle between the Protestants and the Catholics, the body emerges as both a political subject and a political object. The Protestants subjected the Catholics they dominated to their political will through the subjugation and objectification of the body.

In the present article, the humiliation and killing of drug criminals in the Philippines are treated as acts of violence embodied on the body. These acts are designed to produce what van den Haag (1991: 60) called a "credible threat," in which the message is sent to the public that those who breached the law have actually been punished. The killing of criminals in police operations, public spaces and in their homes makes Duterte's threats very real, deterring those who might otherwise violate the law. The humiliation of supposed criminals and labelling their bodies announcing they are criminals is an objectification of the body. It reduces the body to an object as a vehicle to carry political messages. In the war on drugs, this is done first, through official listing of drug dealers, users and criminals, and revealing their names in public; and second, by encouraging their killing, and then humiliating those friends and relatives left behind by placing placards identifying them as criminals who deserved to have been killed. This form of violence is what Feldman calls the commodification of the body by turning it into political text (Feldman 1991: 8). Those who lived at the margin – the poor, and the criminals whom Duterte calls living in "low-lives" – have their bodies made into text by placing placards on them and parading them in public and on marking their corpses when they are killed.

How is the decision made regarding whose body could be used for the "spectacle of violence"? Giorgio Agamben's (1995: 138–141) concept of the "politicization of life," in which political decisions are made to declare whose life has and does not have value, can shed light on the criteria used on those who can be targeted in Duterte's "war on drugs." The Philippine president divides Filipinos into two groups: the drug dealers, addicts and criminals – who are seen as violent law breakers, dangers to social welfare and obstructions to economic development – and law-abiding and god-fearing persons, who are viewed as victims of violence, the human resources for economic development, and the basis of the well-being of future generations. Duterte has been explicit about the need to eliminate the first group in order to protect the second. Agamben locates key precedents of this type of political thinking in the experience of Nazi Germany. The extermination of the incurably ill and the holocaust against the Jews were classic examples of those whose lives were deemed to have no value and thus targeted for elimination. Once a political decision is reached, mass killings of those whose lives are now

declared to have no value become inevitable. Of course, the Philippines is not a totalitarian state, but to the extent that Duterte reached a decision on who can be killed, he made a clear connection to Hitler that he himself has recognised:

> Hitler massacred three million Jews [note: the number was actually six million]. Now [in the Philippines there are] three million drug addicts. There are. I'd be happy to slaughter them. At least, if Germany had Hitler, the Philippines would have, you know, my victims, I would like to be – all criminals to finish the problem of my country and save the next generation from perdition. (*RTVM* 2016: 14:43–15:19)

By deciding who can be killed, Duterte stands as the sovereign, equal to that of a king in Foucault's concept of a sovereign, vested with power to eliminate any life he deems unworthy of being lived, in Agamben's sense. As head of state, Duterte has the capacity to enforce his will by giving orders to the police and the military to enforce the political promises he made to target alleged drug criminals. Agamben (2005: 2) calls this a "state of exception," in which "entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system" are denied state protection. This type of political decision is a conscious act. By excluding the alleged criminals from state protection, Duterte authorises their killings, similar to the language that the German jurist Karl Binding's used to justify the extermination of the "incurably ill." Duterte shares Binding's political thinking who conceptualizes that lives "unworthy of being lived" and people who "neither have the will to live nor the will to die" (Agamben 1995: 137–138) can be eliminated.

Why are leaders who have used violence against criminals so popular? Mumford et al.'s (2007: 220) study on categories of leaders called those who encourage denigration of others "violent ideological leaders." They are popular because the groups they lead "share values, presumably superior values (that) may promote denigration of others who rejects these values." Duterte is popular because of the clarity of his message about who can be killed: drug lords, drug addicts and criminals, preferably men, habitual criminals and drug addicts who repeatedly went into rehabilitation but were never cured. They are, in Duterte's words, "*katok na* (crazy)" and spending money for food, accommodation and doctors for their rehabilitation is "useless" (*YouTube* 2016a: 8:10–11:00). Killing the criminals offers a promise of personal safety, public safety and law and order, which is very appealing to ordinary people who experienced insecurity in their daily lives. By killing the criminals, Duterte claims he could protect and "care for law abiding, god fearing young persons […]

because they are our resources" (*Al Jazeera* 2016a: 7:44–9:12). The protection of the family and its members is core values in Filipino's family tradition that they cherish the most. Duterte's reputation of actively targeting criminals, and his track record in Davao of being able to deliver on his political promises, boosted his popularity and that of those who copied him.

Humiliation: The Living and the Dead as Political Objects

In Duterte's campaign against criminality as former mayor of Davao City, killings were often preceded by humiliation. This method of humiliation began with a list being drawn up by the local Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), based on information supplied by elected city and village officials, police officers and civilian volunteers. Known drug users and persons with criminal records were listed in the "order of battle" (CHR Resolution 2012: 4). This list would be used to visit their houses, known in Cebuano as "*Tokhang*." Before these operations were conducted, Duterte would reveal their names on radio and television shows. According to Fr. Amado Picardal, CSsR, spokesperson of CASE, a coalition campaigning against Davao Death Squad (DDS) killings, "many of those in the list were killed" (Reporter's Notebook 2009: 4:18–4:37). Eighteen persons included on the list as suspects in drug-related offenses have been killed (CHR Resolution 2012: 5).

While Duterte is not the only mayor with a penchant for humiliating criminals, he sets himself apart as "the only mayor brave enough" to do what he threatens to do (*Al Jazeera* 2016a: 15:14–16:14). He expressed anger at former presidents, notably from Estrada (1998 to 2001) to Aquino (2010 to 2016), implying that illegal drugs had become entrenched during this period but the government did little or nothing (*YouTube* 2016b: 02:04–03:01). At the local level, from 1992 to 1998, former Manila Mayor Alfredo Lim humiliated drug dealers and users. He made headlines by having their houses spray-painted with red paint becoming known as "Dirty Harry" (*Asia Sentinel* 2015). Lim's term as mayor of Manila lasted for a total of 12 years,[7] which is far shorter than Duterte's time as mayor (or de facto leader) of Davao. Unlike Duterte, Lim exercised some restraint, taking action that was largely within the law and did not encourage the killing of criminals. Lim's spray-paint campaign was meant only to warn the criminals to stop their illegal activ-

7 Lim was mayor of Manila City from 1992 to 1998 and from 2007 to 2013.

ities and to leave the city. By contrast, Duterte actively pursues and encourages the killing of criminals.

During his abbreviated presidency (1998–2001), President Joseph E. Estrada, like Lim, did not openly endorse the killing of criminals. However, Estrada did have a record of police officers under his command creating a spectacle through violence. When he was vice president from 1992 to 1998, Estrada, who is currently mayor of Manila, and Panfilo Lacson, now an incumbent Senator, were key figures in the Ramos administration's fight against criminality. Lacson was the head of the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force (PAOCTF). Under his leadership, Lacson was prosecuted in 1995 for the killings of 11 members of the *Kuratong Baleleng* gang, a criminal syndicate involved in bank robberies (Bondoc 2002). The killings were purported to have been police rubouts[8], not shoot-outs. In 2012, Lacson was cleared from the allegation of instigating a police rubout (*Rappler* 2012). In 1998, Estrada established the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission and the PAOCTF, agencies tasked to "minimize organized crime syndicates" and to "neutralize[9] their protectors in government" (Executive Order No. 8 1998), suggesting tendencies toward the illegal use of state violence.

Thus, Duterte's use of violence as a spectacle is distinct, even among tough talking politicians. Neither Estrada nor Lim actively targeted criminals for assassination as Duterte has encouraged. During his first state of the nation address (SONA), Duterte ordered the police and the military to "Double your efforts. Triple them, if need be" and do "not stop until the last drug lord, the last financier, and the last pusher have surrendered or put behind bars or below the ground" (*Rappler* 2016b). Adding to this spectacle is coverage by radio, television and newspaper reporters of these police operations. Video recordings and photographs of police killings are taken in which faces of frightened drug addicts and their families are seen daily on television (I-Witness 2016; *Sky News* 2016; Field Notes No. 1, 18 August 2016). It has become commonplace to see bodies of suspected criminals, thrown in alleyways, slums, bushes and garbage collection bins, with placards strapped around their necks read-

8 The term "police rubout" suggests that there was no exchange of gunfire from both sides but a premeditated murder of suspected criminals during police operations.

9 In police and military jargon, "neutralise" is understood to be a euphemism to kill the person.

ing "I am a criminal."[10] They are killed and dumped in public places for spectacle.

This method is similar to past victims of vigilantes in Davao, who were found with multiple stab and gunshot wounds, wrapped in plastic bags and adhesive tape, their hands and legs tied with wire, and bodies dismembered with their heads cut off.[11] When a placard is placed on a dead body, it serves two purposes: first, to shame the person and his or her family; and second, because he or she had been shamed, to justify the person's death before a closer investigation can take place. During the Senate inquiry in August 2016, PNP Chief dela Rosa confirmed that, indeed, they used these placards as evidence that the person was either a drug dealer or a user: "*kasi nakalagay doon eh, may karatula* (It was written there. There is a placard)" (Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights 2016). The police use these placards as explanations as to why the victims were killed. Killings are carried out in public places and placards would be put on the person's dead body after the shooting. There is no clear link yet regarding whether those who place placards on dead bodies of those killed in war on drugs are police officers.[12]

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10 In my data set, of the 1,220 persons killed from 1 July to 10 November. 463 killings of persons were attributed to vigilante groups or death squads. They are attributed to war among drug syndicates. The police classifies these killings as Deaths Under Investigation (DUI). They were killed by hired killers, policemen who become vigilante killers and persons involved in illegal drugs. 75 persons were found dead with placards wrapped around their necks: "*estapador* (a person who embezzle money), *tulak* (drug pusher), *akyat bahay* (a person who breaks into houses), *pamilya* pusher (a family of drug pushers)".

11 In Davao, in 2005 the bodies of Felix Alagao (39), Mark Alagao (39) and Pedro Chavez (in his 40s) were dumped in a ravine in Sta. Cruz, Buhangin on 2 August. They were "hogtied using barbed wire while their mouths were covered with masking tape" (CASE data set, see note no. 3) (on file with the author). On 11 February 2011, the bodies of Noland Matimatico (19) and Yasser Oder (23) were found in Mintal, Tugbok Ditrict. Their bodies were wrapped in packaging tape. One of the victim's hands was hogtied and another was handcuffed. These methods of killings have become a commonplace in Duterte's war on drugs.

12 There was one case before Duterte's presidency. On 26 October 2014, Mike Arnel delos Santos survived eight gunshot wounds after he was shot and abandoned in Taguig City. The suspects, Police office 3 (PO3) Raiden Palma, Nicknok Duenas, a village chairperson, Ronilo Laraya and another suspect, allegedly placed a placard on delos Santos' body announcing he was a "*magnanakaw, karnaper ako* […]" (I am a thief, carnapper) after the shooting (*Pilipino Star Ngayon* 2014). The attempt to kill him and the placing of a placard on his body does not seem to have been actively endorsed by the State at that time.

On 23 July, three persons were killed in separate incidents in Pasay City. In each of the killings, placards were placed on their corpses stating that they were drug dealers and/or robbers (*GMA News* 2016a). One of them was pedicab driver Michael Siaron. A photo of him and his partner, Jennilyn Olayres, embracing his dead body, had a placard beside them that read: "*Drug pusher huwag tularan*" (I am a drug pusher. Don't emulate). This photo stands out as a symbol of Duterte's war on drugs (Lerma 2016; *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2016c; Thompson 2016).

Of the 1,220 individual cases of killings that I have documented, 668 were committed by police officers. These are persons who were killed when they allegedly had shoot-outs with policemen during entrapment operations, when serving arrest and search warrants. Killings during police operations are considered "legitimate encounters". However, some killings during police operations were allegedly rubouts.[13] In Central Mindanao, police officers with alleged links to drug syndicates have killed the street pushers they handle to prevent their exposure. They are the police officers' double agents who provide them with intelligence information from drug syndicates as well as selling drugs for them. The policemen killed them either in vigilante-style killings or during police operations in order to remove links that they also profit from drugs (Interview, 25 August 2016). In the Visayas, the killing of Mayor Rolando Espinosa Jr. of Albuera, Eastern Visayas on 5 November 2016 stands out as a spectacular example of this. The police official who led the operation, which resulted in the killing of Mayor Espinosa inside his detention cell, supposedly "received PHP 1.5 million (USD 30,266) from Kerwin Espinosa." Kerwin was the mayor's son and a known drug lord in the Visayas (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2016g).

Duterte has gained nationwide and international attention for his use of or threats of violence. From a politician at the periphery of national politics, he rose to international prominence and was ranked 70th on a recent Forbes' list of the most powerful people in the world (Corrales 2016). His technique of humiliating criminals has become so popular that some mayors are copying it. In May, when Duterte emerged as a

13 In Mindanao, a journalist interviewed by the author rejected claims by police that the killing of eight persons in Matalam, North Cotabato on 9 July 2016 (*MindaNews* 2016) was the result of a legitimate police operation. It was a "police rubout," the journalist claimed. Some policemen who took part in police operations were themselves alleged protectors of drug lords and handlers of street pushers. These types of rubout killings, according to the informant, began when policemen panicked and feared being exposed either by the drug lords they protect or street pushers they handle.

sure winner in the presidential elections, Tanauan City Mayor Antonio Halili paraded seven drug pushers in what he called "the walk of shame" in the city's public market. They had placards on their necks announcing they were drug pushers (*YouTube* 2016d; *NewsBeat Social* 2016). Halili took pride in being likened to Duterte: "*matapang* (brave)" and talking tough against criminals. He claims his "walk of shame" has been effective at curbing crime[14] (*ABS CBN Bandila* 2016; *ABS CBN* 2014). With Duterte's war on drugs in progress, it emboldened Halili to ignore the CHR, who called his practice "a clear, gross violation of human rights" (*Rappler* 2014). On August 22, Halili paraded another nine suspected drug users and made them carry empty coffins (*Coconuts Manila* 2016). The empty coffins they were carrying supposedly symbolised their own coffins and the death of other pushers if they did not stop selling and using drugs.

Violence: The Davao Model and its Imitators

In January, crowds in Cebu City were amused by Duterte's story of the spectacle of how a hostage-taker was killed in the 1989 hostage crisis in Davao City.[15] He said in Cebuano: "[…] *pag-abot nako, hain na ang sniper? Naa ra. Hala sige 'fire!' Kita ka lagpot ulo. Wa u gud*" ([…] when I arrived at the scene, I asked, 'where is the sniper?' He was there. Go ahead, fire! You see his head [hostage taker] blew away. It disappeared!) (*YouTube* 2016e: 29:25–30:46). Duterte's graphic description of the hostage-taker's head being been blown away and disappearing was intended to send a political message: embodying a spectacular violence by dismembering the body of a criminal. Duterte made it clear why he had ordered the sniper to shoot: "*Basta kriminal, dili jud ko. Dili ko mayor para sa mga kriminal*" (If they are criminals, I do not like them. I am not a mayor for criminals). This incident happened during his first term as mayor of Davao, but it

14 He cited an example in 2014, in which incidents of theft had stopped after he paraded a group of thieves caught stealing dried fish.

15 On 16 August 1989, 21 people were killed, including Australian missionary Jacqueline Hamil, when government forces attacked the Metrodiscom detention centre in Davao City. Duterte must have been referring to Mohammad Nazir Samparani, a former Air Force soldier and leader of the convicts, as the person who was hit by sniper fire. I contacted one of the journalists who had covered the hostage crisis to verify Duterte's claim. The journalist, now head of a provincial information office in one of the provinces in Mindanao, neither confirmed nor denied Duterte's claims.

defined his political career 27 years on as a politician who uses violence and is tough on criminals.

In Davao, Duterte's threats to kill criminals cannot be taken lightly. From 1998 to 2015, 1,424 cases[16] of killings have been documented by CASE. Fr. Picardal notes that most victims were killed by unknown motorcycle-riding gunmen, stabbed to death and summarily executed or "salvaged"[17] for their alleged "involvement in illegal drugs – as users and pushers, in petty crimes-theft, cell-phone snatching, gang members" (Picardal 2016). In 2012, the CHR's investigation into killings in Davao from 2005 to 2009 shows these killings were a "systematic practice […] attributed or attributable to the Davao Death Squad" (CHR Resolution 2012: 18). Edgar Matobato, a self-confessed member of the DDS, vouched for the CHR's findings and claimed they killed "more than a thousand individuals from 1988 to 2013" on the orders of Duterte (Gonzales 2016). The CHR recommended that the ombudsman investigate Duterte for administrative and criminal charges in relation to killings. But on January 15, the ombudsman rejected the CHR's recommendation by 'closing and terminating' their investigation because there was "no evidence to support Duterte's involvement" (Ombudsman, FIO Disposition Form, 2016). The ombudsman cited as their grounds not to prosecute a statement by CHR's regional director in Davao, Alberto Sipaco, in which he claimed the allegations against Duterte were "*chismis* and other gossips" and should not be relied on as facts. In conclusion, "no charges were filed against Duterte" (CHR 2016: 9) despite his admission that, "They say I am the death squad? True, that is true" (*ABS CBN News* 2015; *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2015a). The failure to hold Duterte accountable for drug-related killings in Davao when he was a mayor, and his guarantees of protection from prosecution to the police and the military who kill criminals in the line of duty (Dullana 2016; *Rappler* 2016f), normalises the politicisation of the body of the criminals.

The Duterte administration claims that threatening criminals is effective for curbing crime. In July, Duterte's Communications Secretary,

16 From 1998 to 2015, CASE documentation showed a pattern of killings in which victims were killed by unknown motorcycle-riding gunmen. The killers wore bonnets or balaclavas. The victims were killed by gunshot and stab wounds. Some were stoned to death. The consolidated data of CASE shows the distribution of persons killed each year. In 1998, two persons were killed; 16 in 1999, 11 in 2000, 29 in 2001, 59 in 2002, 98 in 2003, 107 in 2004, 154 in 2005, 65 in 2006, 116 in 2007, 180 in 2008, 100 in 2009, 101 in 2010, 111 in 2011, 61 in 2012, 101 in 2013, 52 in 2014, and 60 in 2015.

17 This term is an euphemism for extrajudicial killings commonly used to describe the political killings of activists during the Marcos dictatorship.

Martin Andanar, attributed the 9.8 percent reduction in crime volume as evidence that the war on drugs is "gaining positive results" (Romero 2016). They pointed to the surrender of 732,000 drug addicts as the reason why the crime rate has declined (*New York Times* 2016; *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2016d). The mass surrender of drug addicts shows Duterte's threat did strike fear into their minds: they would be killed if they did not stop. The act of surrendering had become a technique for drug addicts to preserve their lives. They present themselves as reformed persons and appeal for Duterte's mercy. However, surrendering does not guarantee they would not be targeted in the future, either by the police or vigilantes. Some of those who surrendered have been killed (Field Notes No. 1, 18 August 2016). In his first few weeks in office, Duterte's popularity rating was at 91 per cent, and after six months he still had an "excellent" net satisfaction rating (Adel 2016; *GMA News* 2016b; Ramos 2016). His approval ratings in surveys clearly demonstrate that he still has overwhelming public support.

Duterte has been consistent about his support for the active targeting of criminals, from his time as mayor of Davao, and now as president, in his "war on drugs." In effect, the alleged criminals have become people with no rights and are excluded from the protection of the state. In Duterte's words, there is no redeeming factor in being a criminal, he could not think of any reason or purpose for their continued existence, and he does not care about human rights (*Al Jazeera* 2016a: 7:44–9:12; *Al Jazeera* 2016b). This statement forms and is cemented in the official version of how criminals must be viewed: they are useless, pests and weeds that need to be exterminated. Secondly, public officials who endorse their killing and the police officers who kill them in the line of duty must have protection from prosecution. Under Duterte's presidency, the distinctive form of violence he forged in Davao has become a standard practice nationwide. This practice has transformed from being an unwritten, informal and extra-legal punishment of criminals to an openly endorsed de facto policy of the State. The war on drugs is a radical shift in the functions of state policing since the fall of the Marcos dictatorship: from a policing that protects lives (Tradio 2006: 52) to one that eliminates the lives of those that Duterte deems to have no value.

Duterte's method of actively targeting criminals has influenced mayors in Mindanao and the Visayas. Some mayors have seen its political value as a means to stay in power and its enormous potential in acquiring votes from persons worried about personal security. In Tagum City,

former Mayor Rey Uy, who was in power for 12 years,[18] allegedly institutionalised the formation of the Tagum Death Squad (TDS). He recruited paid killers – police officers, ex-convicts, gangsters, and former members of the New People's Army – and employed them as members of the Civil Security Unit (CSU). The CSU provides them with firearms and pays them "P5, 000 [104 US dollars] for every criminal they killed" (*Rappler* 2015). In 2014, a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report documented 298 killings between January 2007 and March 2013, allegedly by the TDS. Like those killed in Davao City, their targets were also petty criminals, drug dealers, small-time thieves, and children living or working on the streets (HRW 2014). Uy portrayed them as "weeds", implying that they deserved to be eliminated (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2015b). The criminal prosecution of Uy has stalled because the Department of Justice (DoJ) is yet to file murder charges against him in court. Like Uy, the former mayor of Digos City, Arsenio Latasa, was mayor for 15 years. He was consistently elected by popular votes and "obviously the choice of the people".[19] He portrayed criminals and robbers involved in a series of thefts in 2008 as "useless" and "if we need to kill them [criminals], kill them" (*Sun.Star Davao* 2008). The language of Uy and Latasa, former mayors, who endorsed killings of and talked tough on criminals, clearly followed that of Duterte.

In the Visayas, in Cebu City, Sergio Tomas Osmeña staged a successful comeback[20] to become the city's "longest serving Mayor" (Oami-

18 Uy was Mayor of Tagum from 1998 to 2001 and 2004 to 2013.

19 From 1992 to 8 September 2000, Latasa was mayor of what was then the Municipality of Digos, Davao del Sur. When Digos became a city in September 2000, he served as mayor in its transition from a municipality to a city. In 2003, Latasa won a legal battle filed by his opponent in the 2001 mayoralty elections, Romeo Sunga, seeking to disqualify his candidacy and proclamation as mayor. Sunga questioned Latasa's candidacy on the grounds he had completed his three terms as mayor and should be prohibited from assuming the position again. On 10 December 2003, the Supreme Court (SC) upheld Latasa's proclamation as mayor in its decision in *Latasa vs COMELEC* [G.R. No. 154829]. The court argued that Sunga, who got only 13,650, votes "is obviously not the choice of the people" compared to Latasa's 25,335 votes.

20 In 2013 elections, Osmeña lost to Atty. Michael Lopez Rama in his first attempt to return as mayor of Cebu City. Osmeña had been mayor from 1988 to 1995. Like Duterte in Davao, Osmeña endorsed Atty. Alvin Biano Garcia, his vice mayor, to take over as mayor when his three-term limit expired. In 2001, he was again elected as mayor until 2010. In 2010, he was elected as congressman of the Cebu City South District. Osmeña is the grandson of late President Sergio Osmeña III, son of former Senator Sergio Osmeña Jr. and younger sibling of Senator Osmeña III.

nal 2016), with a total of 16 years. When he was mayor from 2004 to 2006, "168 people with criminal records" were killed (Macasero 2016). Osmeña takes pride in the fact that in Cebu he knew exactly "what needs to be done and how to get it done" (*Rappler* 2016e). Osmeña took pride in being the first among city mayors and the most active in Duterte's war on drugs: "*Ako, nauna pa man gani ko* [I was the first to do it]. I was the most active" (*Cebu Daily News* 2016). In May, he set up a reward scheme to pay policemen "P 50,000 [1,041 USD] for each criminal they kill and P 5,000 [104 USD] for each one they wound" (Punzalan 2016). Besides rewarding policemen for their kills, he assured them protection: "If you kill a criminal in the line of duty, no questions asked. I'm there to assist the police, not to prosecute" (*SCMP* 2016). On 5 June, Duterte announced he would pay 5 million PHP (USD 100,000) to anyone who could kill a drug lord and 3 million PHP (USD 60,000) to anyone who could kill their distributor (*GMA 24 Oras* 2016). The reward scheme was an apparent adaptation of Osmeña's reward scheme in Cebu. This reward scheme institutionalised the bounty hunting of drug lord and dealers, from the local to the highest level of the executive power, with guarantees of impunity. Osmeña made it clear that politicians like him are there "to deliver public services, not to govern" (*Rappler* 2016e), which implies that the personal and public safety of his constituents would benefit from his reward scheme to kill criminals.

In Mindanao, in Davao, Duterte's daughter Sara was elected unopposed. Duterte takes pride in Sara, who seems to have continued his legacy of the use of public spectacle of violence. He calls her *maldita* (naughty) for punching a court sheriff (*ABS CBN News* 2011). In Tagum City, Duterte's political ally, Allan Rellon, was elected for his second term. In 2015, Rellon gained a reputation of being "the Duterte of Tagum" when he repeatedly punched and beat his own relative, Jonas Rellon, in front of a rolling camera after Jonas was arrested for selling drugs (*ABS CBN News TV Patrol* 2015). In Digos City, Joseph Peñas was elected for his third term. Although a member of Aquino's Liberal Party, Peñas campaigned on a promise to intensify the crackdown on the use and sale of illegal drugs (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2016a).

Literature on political dynamics in rural areas helps explains why these leaders are so popular. Brian Fegan's (1993: 33–107) study of the De Guzmans, a political family in Central Luzon, argues that they were popular because they are "*magaling na lalaki* [efficient and able men]". They are revered for their "capacity to achieve ends through the use or threat of violence" (Fegan 1993: 54). Their counterpart in rural Visayas is what Michael Cullinane (1993) described as the "*bungoton* [bearded ones]".

Cullinane's (1993: 163–241) work on the Duranos of Danao, a political family in Cebu, explains the capacity of the *bungoton,* portrayed as the frightening monstrous creatures, to kill and use violence against their political opponents. Fegan's work explains the use of violence as a means to extract votes among rural Tagalogs. Cullinane's work is on the use of violence to eliminate political opponents by killing them among rural Cebuanos. However, these studies do not explain the character of Duterte's violence. Unlike these popular leaders who used violence in rural areas, Duterte did not emerge from a rural setting, he did not use violence to coerce voters to elect him and did not use violence to kill his political rivals. Duterte's violence is inscribed and embodied in the bodies of criminals by politicizing and actively targeting them. This is what makes his violence original and distinctive among politicians who use violence. Duterte's violence has added to the catalogue of political violence in local and national politics – from killing political opponents to killing criminals.

By winning the presidency, Duterte proved that a violent crackdown on drugs/criminals can be a means of accumulating enormous political capital. It is the ability to "breach the moral order with impunity" (Fegan 1993: 38) that fascinates the ordinary people to revere these leaders. This phenomenon has expanded from rural, to national and international settings. Duterte has mocked human rights norms, threatened to kill human rights advocates, and has told the public that "my mouth, *walang* due process *dito* (there is no due process here)" (*Rappler* 2016c).

Conclusion

This article has attempted to contribute to the understanding of Duterte's "war on drugs" by focusing on the "spectacle of violence," in which the humiliation and killing and killing of supposed criminals are used to enforce a political promise. The spectacle is "performed" by reducing the body to an object that carries political messages, by politicising the body to boost popularity and as means to acquire votes, and placing the body at the centre by making political decisions on whose life has value and whose does not. Although there are similarities to other Philippine leaders, Duterte has pioneered this approach. His rise to power in national politics is unique and unprecedented in many ways,[21] but it is his capacity to use or threat of violence that has most defined his political career.

21 Duterte is the first president from Mindanao. He also has proclaimed himself as a leftist, though one opposed to armed struggle (*Rappler* 2016a: 4:17–4:37).

It cannot be denied that the Duterte administration enjoys high ratings in opinion surveys, which suggests widespread popular support for his violent crackdown on illegal drugs. Duterte has implemented what he promised during his election campaign. Duterte's form of violence, in which the leaders decide on whose life has value and whose does not, has not been seen in any regime since the fall of the Marcos dictatorship. His practice of violence in Davao has become normalised nationwide but with all the trappings of legal justifications. This seems to have become the new "normal" in Philippine politics.

Duterte's persona as a leader who actively targets criminals and uses the power of the state as means to pursue his end of killing criminals is a sharp contradiction to the kind of leadership that had been imagined in post-Marcos regimes. In Duterte's regime there is a rupture between the "right to life," which the State has a formal obligation to protect, and the power of the president to make political decisions regarding who can be killed. No other Philippine president has ever won office with the promise to kill criminals, implemented his promise and enjoyed such popular support. Political leaders, intellectuals, human rights activists, and the church have all been caught off-guard by Duterte's violence. However, it has come as no surprise to those who know him and who lived in Davao. The failure to comprehend Duterte's politics seems to be due to the assumption that democratic political leaders are accountable to the law, will uphold human rights and notions of equality and employ equal protection. This article has shown that human rights, for Duterte, only applies to law-abiding and god-fearing persons, not to alleged criminals. The former must be protected and the latter must be eliminated. This may appear paradoxical in a democratic country that emerged from three decades of authoritarian rule, until one recalls that as mayor of Davao Duterte was explicit that he cannot be a mayor for criminals. Now he claims he cannot be a president for them either.

Agamben's (1995: 119) work shows us that this phenomenon of the politicisation of life brings into question the existence of a modern man because of his own politics. The expectations of political and legal order after Marcos follows the ideal, in which the fundamental rights of individuals would be upheld to impose checks on abuses of State power, has been put into question in Duterte's war on drugs. His promise to protect the police and military from prosecution for killings in the line of duty effectively invalidates the individual rights formally guaranteed in consti-

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Compared to former President Estrada, who was also a mayor before becoming president, Duterte's term as mayor in Davao was much longer. He is also the oldest president since Marcos fell from power in 1986.

tution and statutes. By using his executive power to guarantee impunity, Duterte conferred on the police and the military a license to kill and the war on drugs normalises the politicisation of the bodies.

Lastly, further research is proposed in order to ascertain the extent of influence of Duterte's form of violence beyond Mindanao and the Visayas. In this article I have focused on Davao and have only partly discussed the cities of Tagum and Digos, all in Mindanao. In the Visayas, I partly discussed Cebu. In these cities there is a clear connection showing that political leaders who actively target criminals gain political benefits from doing so. They win in elections, are re-elected for consecutive terms, and consolidate their power at the local level. This type of political violence, in which votes are acquired on a promise to kill criminals, is becoming increasingly popular. It used to exist at the peripheries of local politics but with Duterte's popularity it has become a national phenomenon. In his work on political violence, Valentino (2014: 91) raised the question of "whether large-scale violence against civilians actually 'works'." The present article suggests that if large-scale violence targets the criminals, the violence works to the extent that the benefit goes to political leaders as their means to acquire votes, raise their popularity and consolidate power. It means when politicians display a spectacle of humiliation and violence, they are not necessarily irrational leaders behaving badly, but are thinking persons who actively pursue criminals in exchange for political benefit. Duterte and the other mayors whom he influenced have adopted his form of violence and are formidable power holders in local politics.

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